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ABSTRACT

Noting that language and politics both grow out of the underlying processes of social agreement and dispute, this paper analyzes the political language of the New Christian Right (NCR) movement as it is found in the national print media. Various sections of the paper discuss the following: (1) the background of the NCR, the characteristics of the organizations comprising it, and the nature of the constituency of those organizations; (2) the change in the NCR from a fundamentalist insurgency movement to a special interest group, prompted in part by the election of a politically conservative President of the United States; and (3) the future of the NCR. (FL)

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The New Christian Right: Communication, Conflict, and the Politics of Language

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I. Introduction

Language and politics are both intensely social in their origins. Both grow out of, and can in turn affect, processes of agreement and dispute. Language as a "system of vocal signs"[1] would be impossible without underlying agreement on basic meanings, syntax and appropriate usage. Yet, disputes over the legitimacy of our interpretations of language do emerge, and they can run just as deep as disputes over political legitimacy: just what do we mean by "high crimes and misdemeanors", for example? Just as we can examine political behavior or election returns in order to learn about underlying political trends and processes, we can study the language of politics to learn about the ways in which people and groups understand the political world and their role in it.

The idea that there is a "politics of language" underlying the language of politics, and that those processes have much to do with wider political events and outcomes, is hardly a new one. More than 35 years ago George Orwell emphasized this interplay between politics and language, contending that the English language "becomes ugly and inaccurate because our thoughts are foolish, but the slovenliness of our language makes it easier for us to have foolish thoughts."[2] This problem is of more than theoretical consequence, he reminded us, because political writing is "largely the defense of the indefensible."[3] In our lifetime the "indefensible" has become so horrible, in its many varieties, that the potential cost of "slovenly language" and "foolish thoughts" can be quite large indeed. For examples of this, we might point to what Richard Hofstadter termed the "paranoid style" of politics[4]; the magnificent obfuscations of the Pentagon Papers, which protected an agency's self-interest by reducing a war to little more than a harmless parlor game for which no one could be called to account; and the labyrinths of self-delusion emerging from the Oval Office on the White House tapes. In none of these cases am I suggesting that tricks of the language

somehow "caused" the entire outcome. Rather, the language and the outcomes grew out of a common process; and one way to begin to understand the outcomes can be to use the language to study the underlying process.

This paper is a step toward such a study of the New Christian Right. By "New Christian Right" I refer to a loose and at times uneasy alliance of religious political action groups, "media ministers" and their evangelical Christian following, which has in recent years been the source of much conservative political action. A general link between religious fundamentalism and conservative politics is nothing new in our system, but aggressive political action in the name of fundamentalist Christianity is an unusual development. "Born again" Americans, as we shall see, are surprisingly diverse in background, political sentiments, and even religious outlook; yet New Christian Right (hereafter, "NCR") groups pursue a specific and coherent political agenda, and seem to be able to frame seemingly non-religious issues, such as foreign policy, in religious terms for many of their followers.

Central to this process are the major organizations of the NCR, such as Christian Voice and Moral Majority Incorporated. In a process which David Cameron, writing about other sorts of groups, has termed "political induction",[5] these organizations can bring people into politics and impose a degree of strategic coherence upon their diverse discontents. This is the process upon which I wish to focus; and while surveys of born-again Christians (which we will examine in a later section) can tell us much about the hopes and fears of an important segment of the public, the study of political language should help us understand this political induction process, and point to the emergence and change of basic strategies.

What follows is a preliminary analysis which draws upon the political language of NCR organizations and leaders as extracted from the national print

media. Clearly, such a "data base" represents only a fraction of the political language of the NCR, and the examples which I will present represent only a fraction of that. I will be passing over, for the time being, the language of the "video church", and of the movement's own print media through which it appeals to followers and sympathizers. To some extent, this narrowness of focus reflects the preliminary stage of my work; I hope to expand the inquiry into a more comprehensive study of other sources as well. But the narrow focus also grows out of the specific concern of this paper: the basic political strategies which NCR leaders and organizations are pursuing. The political language of NCR leaders in the national media illuminates these strategies at least to some extent, for here the leadership is describing and justifying their movement to others who are curious about its general political role. In fact, I will argue that this political language points to a significant change in NCR strategy over recent months: from fundamentalist insurgency to more traditional interest-group politics.

II. What is the New Christian Right?

America's New Christian Right is both old and new. It taps cultural currents which run deep in the American experience, and in its regional and religious base reflects fundamental divisions in our history and politics. Yet the NCR also manifests new strategies and concerns, and displays a mastery of modern communications techniques which a Father Coughlin could only dimly comprehend.

Why, if its roots are sunk deep in our history, did the NCR come upon the political stage when it did? Several factors probably enter into this development, ranging from the destabilizing and (to some) frightening political developments of the past twenty years to the continuing growth of the "Sunbelt" in population and affluence. One more recent development which deserves particular attention, however, is the strange career of Jimmy Carter. Carter's rise to

national prominence in 1975 and 1976 as an avowedly "born again" politician explicitly raised the issue of the relationship between fundamentalist religion and politics. For many who consider themselves "born again", it compelled a consideration of this relationship. The born-again vote was important in Carter's victory: among white Baptists nationwide, Carter defeated Ford by a 56-43% margin.[6] Once in office, however, the man who seemed so closely tied to born-again Christianity acted in ways which disappointed many of his fundamentalist backers. Political activist Colonel Donner, of the NCR organization Christian Voice, expressed that sort of reaction: "It was a tremendous letdown, if not a betrayal, to have Carter stumping for the ERA, for not stopping federally paid abortions, for advocating homosexual rights."[7] Thus aroused, many fundamentalist Christians struck back at Carter in 1980; this time he lost the white Baptist vote by 56-34%. One interpretation of Harris poll results has it that as much as two-thirds of Reagan's margin over Carter can be explained by this shift in white fundamentalist sentiment.[8] Carter's presence on the national political stage thus seems to have been catalyst in the rise of the NCR, first by drawing attention to the role of born-again Christians in politics, and then by giving NCR leaders a sense of betrayal and a set of grievances around which to build a movement.

The movement which they built can be looked at in two ways: at the elite level, as a group of organizations and as a highly visible presence in the media; and at the mass level, as drawing upon the nation's numerous "born again" Christians for its constituency. A brief examination reveals a tightly-organized presence at the elite level, but surprising diversity in the ranks of the mass following.

Organizing the New Christian Right

Most visible and widespread of the NCR's activities are the broadcasts of such "media ministers" as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and James Robison.

These media efforts win for the NCR a presence and income which would make any political organizer envious. Falwell's "Old-Time Gospel Hour", for example, appears on 681 television and radio stations each week, drawing an audience estimated at over 21 million persons.[9] These programs generate approximately $1 million in contributions each week.[10] The New York Times reports survey data indicating that 30% of the American public, and 46% of those Protestants who regard themselves as evangelicals, watch or listen to religious broadcasts "frequently".[11] The political content of such broadcasts is at times quite clear: Jerry Falwell held a 1980 broadcast on the steps of the US Capitol. James Robison has hosted such guests as Governor John Connally and Congressman Philip Crane, and has also invited viewers to send in for political pins and bumper stickers. Yet these programs are usually regarded as religious broadcasts by the FCC and by the stations which transmit them, and are thus free from "fairness" requirements and other policies generally applying to political programming.

This "electronic pulpit" is an interesting case of the political uses of language. What are the effects of the video ministry on the political attitudes and behavior of the audience? The viewers' survey cited above showed that those who frequently watch or listen to religious programs are, as a group, "far more conservative than other groups on a wide array of issues."[12] Audiences for these broadcasts are self-selected, so it is unlikely that they have created a conservative constituency by sheer force of persuasion. But these broadcasts may well reinforce and add political saliency to viewers' existing sentiments, and may also serve to provide a religious interpretation for newly-emerging political issues and personalities. Analysis of such processes, unfortunately, must await survey and other sorts of research which are beyond the scope of this paper.

Beyond the NCR's media image lie a number of important organizations which

work to organize evangelical Christians for political action. Three of the most important groups are Christian Voice, Religious Round Table, and Moral Majority Incorporated.[13]

Christian Voice, with offices in Pacific Grove, California, and Washington, D.C., is a policy-oriented lobby group made up of clergy. As of early 1980, it claimed a membership of 2,000 ministers and a yearly budget of $3 million. The group was formed initially to win passage of school-prayer legislation, but has since moved into a number of other policy areas. Religious Round Table is a group of about 56 conservative clergy, including some Catholics and Jews. From its headquarters in Rosslyn, Virginia, the organization sponsors "educational seminars" on religious and political matters. It is supported not only by contributions from sympathetic church congregations, but by funds from some businesses as well. Of all New Christian Right groups, Religious Round Table has the closest ties to other new-right political action committees. Reverend Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority Incorporated is probably the best-known NCR organization because of his extensive use of the mass media. Indeed, "moral majority" has become a shorthand term for the whole New Christian Right. Moral Majority claims to have over 72,000 clergy on its mailing list, and a mass following as large as four million. Its national office in Forest, Virginia, is home to four main branches, devoted to education, lobbying, endorsement of candidates, and legal aid for court cases involving religious issues. The first three of these sub-organizations enjoy tax-exempt status.

These organizations do not necessarily speak for all who consider themselves born-again. Indeed, the considerable diversity of born-again America will be the focus of the next section. They do, however, formulate and pursue basic political strategies--and they are the sources of much of the political language which will be employed to study those basic political approaches.

Evangelical Christians: Surprising Diversity

Evangelical, or "born-again", Christians are the basic mass constituency of the NCR. The extensive attention focused upon their religion and politics, the fact that many evangelicals insist upon a strictly literal interpretation of scripture, and the overwhelmingly conservative flavor of NCR broadcasts and statements make it tempting to conclude that evangelicals constitute a large, disciplined political army ready and willing to back a single line of policy. But in truth born-again Christians are diverse in background, in political preferences, and even in religious outlook. They differ among themselves as to what role, if any, religion should play in politics. And while they are generally of one mind on some issues, such as prayer in public schools, on many others they are no less divided than the population as a whole.

As we might expect, the size and characteristics of the born-again movement depend upon how we define being born again. When survey researchers have simply asked people whether or not they consider themselves born-again Christians, responses have been sizeable. In March, 1980, a Washington Post poll reported that 44% of the Christians surveyed called themselves "born-again".[14] The New York Times in June of 1980 noted that various surveys have found that as many as 29% of the Catholics, and "over half" of Protestants contacted, claim to be born again. The Times added that one of its own surveys had found that born-again respondents made up 42% of a national sample.[15] This sort of self-labeling, though, hides much diversity. For some respondents, being "born again" may correspond to an intense personal religious experience, while for others it may simply mean adherence to a particular style of religion. And, as we shall see in a moment, there are many styles of born-again religion.

A 1980 Gallup survey used a more restrictive definition of what it means to be born again, and yielded an interesting picture of the backgrounds of fundamentalist Christians. Respondents were asked three questions: whether

or not they would describe themselves as being "born again", or as having had a "born-again experience"; whether or not they actively encouraged others to believe in Jesus; and whether or not they believed in a strictly literal reading of the Bible. Only those who answered "yes" to all three questions--19% of the national sample--were regarded as "born again" Christians. Survey data on the number of "born again" respondents in various social categories are presented in Table I.

Table I goes about here.

The major tendencies revealed in the data in Table I are not surprising: the born-again movement is strongest, it seems, among Baptists, in the South, in small towns, and among people with only modest educational and occupational status. But the poll data also suggest that many who meet this rather restrictive definition of being "born again" do not fall into the dominant categories. Many would seem to be from outside the South, from larger communities, to be members of other religious denominations than the Baptist (a term which embraces considerable diversity in its own right), and to be young and somewhat more educated. Particularly striking is the fact that, while the born-again movement as a whole is predominantly white, a non-white person seems proportionally twice as likely to be "born again" than a white. Clearly, behind the white Southern Baptist facade there is much social diversity.

This diversity is reflected in religious terms as well, particularly if we look at the larger number of people who simply describe themselves as born again.[16] Within this group we find both "true evangelicals" who believe in literal readings of the Bible, and "worldly evangelicals" who see room for interpretation. About a third of the evangelicals are "charismatics" and Pentecostal Christians, whose practices include glossolalia, or speaking in tongues. Catholic evangelicals tend to be less conservative than their Protestant counterparts, yet more conservative than other Catholics.[17] Some evangelicals

Table I: "Born-Again" Christians as Percentages of Major Social Groupings (Gallup, 1980)

National Sample:	19%
Sex:	
Female	36
Male	16
Race:	
Non-white	36
White	16
Education:	
Grade School	30
High School	19
College	12
Region:	
South	33
Midwest	16
West	13
East	10
Political Affiliation:	
Southern Democrat	39
Republican	22
Northern Democrat	15
Independent	14
Religion:	
Baptist	42
(All Protestants)	28
Methodist	18
Presbyterian	16
Lutheran	10
Catholic	6
Episcopalian	4
Age:	
50 or over	22
30-49	19
25-29	15
18-24	13
Occupation:	
Clerical, Sales	25
Manual Labor	21
Not Working	21
Professional	11
Size of Community:	
2,500 or less	26
2,500- 49,999	20
50,000-499,999	17
500,000-999,999	14
1,000,000 or more	14

- Figures represent percentage of respondents in each category identified as "born again" Christians.

- Respondents were asked whether or not they considered themselves "born again", or had had a "born-again experience"; whether or not they encouraged others to believe in Jesus; and whether or not they believed in a strictly literal reading of the Bible. "Born again" Christians were defined, for purposes of breakdowns above, as those answering "yes" to all three questions.

- Source: New York Times, September 7, 1980, p. 34. Poll data gathered by the Gallup Organization.

feel it is their duty to make their religious convictions known through active political efforts, while others object to such practices on principle. Still others see "worldly politics" as futile, contending that the world is nearing its last days and that Christians should be preparing for their final judgment. Leaders of the New Christian Right have at times been strongly criticized by religious figures even more conservative than they: Rev. Jerry Falwell has been taken to task by the Reverends Bob Jones, Jr. and Bob Jones III for associating with ERA opponent Phyllis Schlafly, on the grounds that Schlafly is a Roman Catholic.[18]

Born again Christians are also surprisingly diverse in their views on questions of public policy. They tend to regard themselves as conservatives: 37% of the evangelicals in a September, 1980 Gallup survey described their own "political position" as being "Right-of-center", compared to 31% of all voters. And on certain issues evangelicals speak with near-unanimity: 81% favored prayer in public schools (compared to 59% of all voters), and only 15% supported the right of homosexuals to teach in public schools (versus 31% of respondents overall). But on other issues, evangelicals' opinions are neither monolithic nor distinctive: 51% of evangelicals favored the death penalty in murder cases, compared to 52% of all voters; 54% favored government programs "to deal with social problems", compared to 53% of all voters; and 41% favored banning all abortions, compared to 31% of all voters.[19] Nor should we conclude that evangelicals' opinions are rigid and unchanging: while Jimmy Carter led Ronald Reagan among evangelicals by a 52-31 percent margin in September, 1980 (compared to a 39-38 percent standoff among all voters), Reagan ended up carrying the born-again vote by a wide margin, as noted above.

How, out of this diverse constituency, did the NCR fashion a palpable presence in the 1980 campaign? The answer to this is that the movement's leaders and organizations were quite successful at political induction. While

they certainly did not enlist the backing of all evangelical Christians, and did not necessarily "deliver" the votes of those who did enlist, they still brought significant numbers of people together in a common political strategy.

In the section which follows, I will analyze the strategies of the NCR through its political language. I will suggest that at the outset of the 1980 campaign, the NCR was predominantly a "fundamentalist insurgency" emphasizing populism, redemption, and what David Apter has called "consummatory" values--questions of "ultimate ends or 'meaning'".[21] During this phase, the NCR was storming a corrupted political system from without, with the goal of totally redeeming it. As the campaign developed, however--and particularly after the election--important segments of the NCR have shifted to interest-group politics. Here, the values are "instrumental"--Apter's term again--policy concerns are rather specific, and the tactics involve work for one's own rights within the existing political order. The sources and implications of this change of strategies will be the focus of the concluding section of the paper.

III. Two Phases of the New Christian Right

The NCR as Fundamentalist Insurgency

At one point in mid-1979, I had a discussion with my students in which I contended that Reverend Jerry Falwell could be regarded as "America's Ayatollah". My assertion was neither unique nor profound; but it seemed to capture certain key points about the political role of the NCR. Like the Ayatollah and his followers, the NCR in this phase was a redemption crusade storming the existing political order from without. NCR leaders held out an image of a once-moral nation gone astray. Politics and decisionmaking, the schools, and popular culture had become dominated by "humanists", who allegedly acted on secular, amoral whims and desires, rather than on Biblical moral precepts. The litany of manifestations of "humanism" emphasized issues of culture and morality--pornography

the rights and status of homosexuals, drag use--but also included more general policies, such as the welfare system, the proposed Equal Rights Amendment, and arms-limitation efforts. An important theme was one of disdain for existing parties, elites, and interest groups, for virtually the entire political process had become tainted by "humanism". The New Christian Right's "redemption" of that process, therefore, would of necessity be redemption from without.

The political language of the NCR in this phase emphasized several strategic themes, in addition to the overall issue of "morality". One was struggle. The nation was seen as in the grip of strong, dangerous forces, forces which NCR supporters were obliged to fight. James Robison, a video minister, advertised one of his broadcasts in the New York Times by proclaiming: "WAKE UP AMERICA--We're All Hostages!", and added "America is in Trouble! We face losing all our forefathers fought to provide as runaway government and godless forces attack our freedom and families! Find out what you can do!"[22]

A second theme was mobilization: maximizing the strength of unified numbers. Reverend Jerry Falwell, speaking to a Florida branch of his Moral Majority Incorporated, argued such a theme: "What can you do from the pulpit?... You can register people to vote. You can explain the issues to them. And you can endorse candidates, right there in church on Sunday morning."[23] Falwell also claimed that while he did not make endorsements as such, he did discuss his views on candidates, and that upon hearing such discussions 97% of his parishioners would vote accordingly. This theme of mobilization has significance at several levels. First, of course, it is simply an appeal for like-minded persons to join forces. But it implies two related ideas: first, that the mobilized movement will be characterized by singleness of purpose and conviction; and second, that it can become a dominant, even a majority, movement. These sub-themes are common to many mobilization movements, and are not the property of the NCR alone; still, they are the basis for much of the concern which has been voiced over the movement and its goals.

That some of this concern had a real basis can be seen in the third theme of the fundamentalist insurgency's political language: victory and redemption. Growing out of the themes of struggle and mobilization, this theme suggested that the NCR would not only "win", but that its majoritarian mandate would be virtually unlimited. Reverend Falwell spoke of "making America a Christian nation." A New Christian Right political caucus in Dallas, at which then-candidate Ronald Reagan spoke, featured the opinion of one minister that "God doesn't hear the prayers of a Jew". Television evangelist Pat Robertson voiced perhaps the clearest expression of this theme when he said, "We have enough votes to run the country... And when the people say, 'we've had enough', we are going to take over."[24] It is this theme of victory and total redemption which most clearly marked the NCR as a "fundamentalist insurgency" during this phase of its existence, and which most clearly set it apart from many other mobilization movements--such as civil-rights groups--which have emphasized the struggle and mobilization themes.

In a sense, the political language of this first phase offered a complete scenario of political conflict and redemption. America is attacked, and seemingly conquered, by the sinister forces of "humanism"; right-thinking citizens mobilize their unified strength, and win a great victory which redeems the nation, presumably once and for all. Such a scenario, it seems, would have a natural attraction for people used to thinking of the world in millenarian terms. The redemption part of the scenario in particular presents a virtually unlimited conception of the majoritarian mandate: that a majority--especially a "moral" one--need not be reluctant to make a nation over in its own image.

The NCR's political language, in this phase, bears a superficial resemblance to that identified by Hofstadter as embodying the "paranoid style". Fundamentalist insurgents spoke heatedly of the menace of "humanism"; and for them, as for the politically paranoid, "time is forever just running out".[25] But the language lacks the full degree of exaggeration and fantasy which marks the true paranoid

style: while allegations of a "humanist threat" certainly seem exaggerated to my judgment, they do not measure up to the visions of a "vast, insidious, preternaturally effective international conspirational network"[26] which Hofsfadter found to be a basic paranoid theme. Further, where the truly "politically paranoid" tend to see conspiracy itself as the fundamental "moving force" of history,[27] NCR followers, by and large, do not; indeed, those who believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible and its explanation of history probably cannot concede that much power to the "humanists".

The political language of the fundamentalist insurgency phase instead resembles more closely the "pseudo-conservative" style identified by Adorno[28] and elaborated upon by Hofstadter. The NCR's symbolism is conservative--"big government", "godless forces"--and while specific policy proposals took a back seat to more sweeping cultural and "morality" issues in this phase, they too are conservative in nature. But the struggle-mobilization-redemption scenario discussed above is anything but conservative. Indeed, it is revolutionary, and envisions a virtual theocracy in which basic constitutional guarantees of privacy, separation of church and state, and traditions of cultural pluralism would be swept aside. While opponents of the NCR have indulged in their share of political exaggeration, it is little wonder that many people found the rise of the movement quite disturbing.

In sketching out these dominant themes of NCR political language in this phase, I do not mean to imply that all public utterances followed precisely this format, nor that all who sympathized with the NCR were of one mind on every issue and tactic. And of course I have not attempted to present all of the political language of this phase. Rather, I am trying to identify dominant theories in political strategy; and in this phase the themes are those of fundamentalist insurgency and redemption from without. As the 1980 campaign unfolded, however, and particularly after it reached its conclusion, the NCR found itself

very much immersed in, and constrained by, the very political system it sought to redeem. The result was a fundamental change in strategy--one which did not take place overnight, and which may yet be incomplete, but one which has produced a new interest-group role. These changes are the subject of the section which follows.

The Second Phase: NCR as Interest Group

The NCR's interest-group strategy began to emerge during the 1980 election campaign, and has further developed since Ronald Reagan's victory. Change has come gradually, affecting some wings of the movement more than others, and is not necessarily permanent. It is a significant change nonetheless, and can be seen in the NCR's political language.

By "interest-group" I refer to groups which work within the political order, rather than seeking to storm it from without; to groups whose norms and goals are predominantly specific and instrumental, rather than diffuse and consummatory (to borrow Apter's distinction again); and to those which are more or less ad-hoc alliances of citizens and groups which share some, but not all, concerns, sentiments, and commitments. The League of Women Voters and the American Farm Bureau Federation are interest groups, by this definition; the New Christian Right, in its first phase, was not.

To some extent a shift toward an interest-group strategy is hardly surprising, for the tasks of politics between elections differ somewhat from those during campaigns. In election years, mass mobilization efforts and participation in the electoral arena are a major order of business, while between elections the emphasis shifts toward lobbying and bargaining in legislative and bureaucratic arenas. This is not to imply that lobbyists close up shop in election years, or that efforts at mobilizing the public cease between elections. Rather, I refer to changes in emphasis. Thus, the NCR placed major emphasis on voter registration in the months leading up to the 1980 election; but since that time,

efforts have shifted to support for important pieces of legislation, such as the so-called "Family Protection Act".

The strategic changes which are my concern in this section, however, are more fundamental than those cyclical changes of emphasis. What is emerging is a new phase of NCR activity in which strategies, relationsips with the rest of the political system, and even organizational self-image resemble much more those of interest-groups than those of the old fundamentalist insurgency. These changes can be seen in the major themes of recent NCR language.

The first major theme is a declared intent to work within the established political order. While the idea of a "humanist" threat remains, the NCR is now less given to depicting the political system and its major actors as hopelessly compromised. Moral Majority Incorporated published a manifesto in the New York Times of March 23, 1981, for example, which stated that "We are not a political party. We are committed to work within the two-party system in this nation. ... We are not attempting to elect 'born again' candidates. We are committed to pluralism."[29] Perhaps most striking in this regard is the following statement:

> ... Moral Majority Inc. is not a religious organization attempting to control the government. ... We simply desire to influence government--not control government. This, of course, is the right of every American, and Moral Majority Inc. would vigorously oppose any Ayatollah-type person rising to power in this country."[30]

A major sub-theme in this connection is that members of the NCR are simply insisting on their rights within the system--asking that their status and values be given the same respect accorded to others'. Reverend Falwell, early in 1980, began to refer to his following as "the largest minority bloc in the United States." He also stated, "we're 40 percent of the electorate... If [President Carter] named good Christians to 40 percent of the good jobs, we'd think about supporting him."[31] This last sounds almost like an affirmative-action program for the righteous, and resembles the arguments of other minority-

and ethnic-based interest groups much more than those of a fundamentalist insurgency. The Times manifesto reinforces this sub-theme by contending at several points that all the Moral Majority is really doing is exercising those political rights which all citizens hold in a democracy.

One question which must be raised at this point is whether or not these assurances can be taken at face value. The NCR in general, and Reverend Falwell's Moral Majority Incorporated in particular, aroused considerable opposition and concern during the 1980 campaign; perhaps the reassurances, and the Times manifesto in particular, are simply intended to put a less threatening face on the fundamentalist insurgency. Such a question is difficult to answer absolutely. But even if the NCR were simply cleaning up its image, that fact in itself would be of interest. Presumably, fundamentalist insurgents who wish to reshape a nation in their own image would feel little need to brush up their image in the pages of the most "establishment-oriented", cosmopolitan newspaper in the nation. Further, I will suggest later on that, while we need not take every statement solely at face value, there are systemic developments and historical precedents suggesting that the NCR's changes are more than superficial.

Second among the newly-emerging themes is that of tolerance for pluralism. While the NCR still sees a threat from "pornographers, abortionists and humanists", they seem more likely now to express at least a tolerance for the fact that America is a diverse nation. This notion is consistent with the intent to work within the existing order, and with the idea that NCR members are simply insisting on their own democratic rights; and it is quite a change for a movement which formerly proclaimed its intent to "make America a Christian nation". The Times manifesto of Moral Majority, Incorporated states that "We are not a censorship organization.... Moral Majority Inc. is not an organization committed to depriving homosexuals of their civil rights as Americans.... No anti-semitic

influence is allowed in Moral Majority Inc."[32] A final statement on this theme is that:

> We do not believe that individuals or organizations which disggree with Moral Majority Inc. belong to an immoral minority. However, we do feel that our position represents a consensus of the majority of Americans. This belief in no way reflects on the morality of those who disagree with us.[33]

A third and final theme is that of internal diversity and ad hoc commitments. A fundamentalist insurgency demands single-mindedness and total commitment of its followers. But the New Christian Right as interest group emphasizes diversity in its membership and in their convictions. "We are Catholics, Jews, Protestants, Mormons, Fundamentalists--blacks and whites--farmers, housewives, businessmen",[34] says the Times Manifesto. In describing the group's stand against abortion, it adds, "Some of us [oppose abortion] from a theological perspective. Other Moral Majority Inc. members believe this from a medical perspective."[35] In affirming its support for Israel, it states,

> Many Moral Majority Inc. members, because of their theological convictions, are committed to the Jewish people. Others stand upon the human and civil rights of all persons as a premise for support of the state of Israel. Others support Israel because of historical and legal arguments.[36]

The image sought by this "new" manifestation of Moral Majority Incorporated is one of an organization characterized by ad hoc commitments: one which people join in order to voice common concerns and to support specific initiatives. Hence,

> Moral Majority Inc. is a political organization providing a platform for religious and non-religious Americans, who share moral values, to address their concerns in these areas. Members of Moral Majority Inc. have no common theological premise.[37]

These themes of political language--the intent to work within the established political order, the tolerance for pluralism, and emphasis on internal diversity and ad-hoc commitments--point to a new interest-group strategy for the NCR. While the language of the fundamentalist insurgency implied a complete

political scenario of struggle, mobilization and redemption, the interest-group role suggests no such millenarian view. Rather, it suggests a more open-ended role as one of a number of forces within a diverse political order, and a strategy of providing for relatively specific goals: a "Family Protection Act", and an anti-abortion Constitutional amendment. These goals are hardly modest, but they fall well short of reshaping the entire political system.

We should remember, at the same time, that this change is not necessarily universal, nor is it complete. Local groups in the New Christian Right have recently indulged in book-burnings, for example, which hardly display much tolerance for pluralism. Moral Majority's own manifesto speaks of the group as "united by one central concern--to serve as a special interest group providing a voice for a return to moral sanity in these United States of America", and of "organizing and training millions of Americans who can become moral activists."[38] Much about the NCR has not changed: While it may be in the midst of a transition to new strategies, its substantive positions on cultural and ethical issues remain rather extreme. A complete understanding of the significance of the changes outlined above--indeed, a conclusive verdict on how much has changed at all--must await the passage of time, and more extensive study. Still, we can speculate on reasons for the change in strategy, and on possible future roles for the NCR.

IV. Why the Changes?

To the extent that the changes in NCR strategies are real ones, they grow not merely out of the whims of the movement's leadership but out of more basic events and aspects of our politics. NCR leaders may have originally conceived of their movement as transcending the traditional dynamics of politics, but its strategic development has been directly affected by some of those very forces. Indeed, there are even some historical precedents for the sorts of changes we have discussed.

Brokerage Politics. The predominant style of American politics at the national level is one of brokerage or compromise among a variety of interests and constituencies. This is an incremental politics characterized by instrumental goals and norms, and is clearly a style not suited to a fundamentalist insurgency. Indeed, in the Congress, this brokerage style has swallowed up many political crusades in our history, such as Populism. In the electoral arena, brokerage among interests is common as well, and has been reinforced in recent years by campaign finance legislation, which to an extent imposes a common interest-group role upon a wide range of institutional participants in campaigns. Finally, American campaigns are still won and lost in the ideological middle.

These factors created strong incentives for the NCR to shift to an interest-group stance. Fundamentalist insurgencies by definition cannot bargain and compromise; and if they cannot do that, they can accomplish little in Congress or in the bureaucracy. This generalization, I venture to say, will hold time even in the new Congress, for new members will still encounter the dominant brokerage style, will still have to look after their own districts if they wish to be re-elected, and will also find that "morality" issues are but a small segment of the problems which will confront them. Campaign finance reforms treat political organizations as interest groups regardless of their agendas; if they spend money on elections, they must report expenditures and otherwise account for their activities. And winning elections "in the middle", even in years such as 1980, encourages groups not to antagonize middle-of-the-road voters. These incentives do not render all political organizations identical, in any deterministic sense; but they do significantly encourage "insurgents" to behave in more traditional ways, lest they accomplish very little politically.

Diversity of "Born Again" America. In an earlier section I discussed the rather surprising degree of diversity to be found in the ranks of the "born again". This factor, too, probably encourages a transition to an interest-group strategy.

To win single-mindedness and total commitment from a group of people as large and differentiated as the "born again" would be virtually impossible. As an interest group, however, the NCR could survive with a degree of internal diversity and limited, ad-hoc commitments. In this sense, the "video ministers" and other NCR leadership are constrained by the size and diversity of their flock. Paradoxically, it may well be that if the flock grows larger, it will become even more unruly, and that if it were pared down to a true insurgency of the totally committed, it would be so reduced in size as to be largely ineffective.

The Reagan Landslide. Ironically enough, the NCR is also constrained in its strategies by the very success it and the right in general encountered at the polls in 1980. Reagan won the White House by a wide margin; the Republicans gained in the House and took control in the Senate. But these developments, far from giving the NCR total license, encourage it instead to adopt the interest-group role.

One reason for this is that the new Congress presents the NCR, and the right in general, with its best opportunity in many years to win passage of favorable legislation. To succeed at this, the NCR will have to adopt the time-honored methods of other interest groups, and will have to be prepared to hold on through a long process of political pulling and hauling in order to achieve relatively specific ends. Those followers truly interested in the millenarian politics of redemption may well find this process discouraging, and move off to other pursuits; those who are not will find themselves immersed in a complex process of legislative politics which consists of a great deal in addition to their "Christian" agenda. Either way, the NCR's strategy and presence in the legislative process will be very much like that of hundreds of other groups seeking favorable decisions from Congress.

The Reagan landslide constrains the NCR in a more general sense as well, for it is very difficult to be insurgents when your side is in power. Daniel Bell has commented on the same phenomenon in reverse, as it related to the "Far Right" of the 1950s.[39] However much they may have felt the urgency of their political tasks, Dwight Eisenhower's presence in the White House--as a Republican, a moderate conservative and a military man--kept them from unleashing the full scope of their discontent and resentment. When John Kennedy took over the Presidency in 1961, however, they were once again able to point to weakness and treachery in high places, and right-wing activity showed a substantial increase during those years. Similarly, with Reagan in power, the NCR will find it very difficult to contend that "immorality" holds the political high ground; but should the Democrats return to power, many constraints would be removed.

The Future of the NCR?

As noted above, I am discussing changes and transitions which are still in progress, and whose permanence and implications can only be guessed. Much of the future of the NCR depends upon the Presidency--upon not only how long Ronald Reagan holds power, and who will succeed him when he leaves office, but also upon the degree to which he satisfies or disappoints the NCR. Just as Jimmy Carter's election and subsequent policies did much to encourage the rise of the NCR, Reagan's administration will have much to do with its course over the near future. Should Reagan prove satisfactory to the NCR, and should his successors be similar in their convictions and policies, it is not difficult to imagine the NCR evolving into an institutionalized interest group--somewhat unusual in its policy preferences, but certainly no insurgency: something of a "Conservative Council of Churches". But should Reagan give way to a liberal successor, or should Reagan badly disappoint the NCR and its leadership, the insurgency model could surface again, and in a climate of weakened political

parties and an alienated, frustrated electorate, could make many of its critics' fears come to pass.

This analysis has of necessity been a tentative one, its inferences based upon only a preliminary reconnaissance of the political language of the New Christian Right. Broader, more systematic research over the next few years may make many of my generalizations appear weak indeed. But the NCR and its political language present a rich and challenging focus of analysis--one which can shed light not only on contemporary political developments, but on the politics of language as well.

NOTES

1. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge. (New York: Doubleday Anchor Edition, 1967), pp. 36-37. See, for a general perspective, Chapter 3.

2. George Orwell (Eric Blair), "Politics and the English Language" (1946) in In Front of Your Nose, vol. IV of the Collected Essays Journalism and Letters of George Orwell. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968), p. 128.

3. Ibid, p. 136.

4. Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics", in Hofstadter, The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1965), pp. 3-40.

5. David R. Cameron, "Toward a Theory of Political Mobilization," Journal of Politics 36:1 (February 1974), pp. 139-143.

6. "New Resolve by the New Right", Time (December 8, 1980), p. 24. (ABC News/Harris Poll exit surveys)

7. "A Tide of Born-Again Politics", Newsweek (September 15, 1980), p. 31.

8. True, "New Resolve" (December 8, 1980), p. 24.

9. Newsweek, "A Tide of Born-Again Politics" (September 15, 1980), p. 35.

10. "Militant Television Preachers Try to Weld Fundamentalist Christians' Political Power", New York Times (January 21, 1980), p. 21.

11. "Evangelicals' Vote is a Major Target", New York Times (June 29, 1980), p. 16.

12. Ibid.

13. The following discussion of three major NCR organizations draws upon New York Times, "Militant Television Preachers" (January 21, 1980), p. 21.

14. "Born-Again Politics is Still Waiting to Be", Washington Post (March 30, 1980), p. C-5.

15. New York Times, "Evangelicals' Vote" (June 29, 1980), p. 16.

16. Washington Post, "Born-Again Politics" (March 30, 1980), p. C-5.

17. New York Times, "Evangelicals' Vote" (June 29, 1980), p. 16.

18. "The New Moral America and the War of the Religicos", Washington Post (August 24, 1980), p. H-5.

19. Newsweek, "A Tide of Born-Again Politics" (September 15, 1980), p. 34; and "Poll Finds Evangelicals Aren't United Voting Bloc", New York Times (September 7, 1980), p. 34.

20. Ibid., and New York Times/CBS News exit polling, reported in New York Times, November 9, 1980, p. 28.

21. David E. Apter, Choice and the Politics of Allocation. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 21 and passim.

22. New York Times, June 28, 1980.

23. New York Times, "Militant Television Preachers" (January 21, 1980), p. 21.

24. Washington Post, "Born-Again Politics" (March 30, 1980), p. C-1.

25. Hofstadter, "Paranoid Style", p. 30.

26. Ibid., p. 14.

27. Ibid., p. 29.

28. The concept of "pseudo-conservatism" originated in T.W. Adorno et.al., The Authoritarian Personality. (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1950; W. W. Norton, 1969), p. 50, pp. 675ff. The idea is elaborated upon in the context of American politics by Hofstadter in three essays, "The Pseudo-Conservative Revolt-1954", pp. 41-65 in The Paranoid Style in American Politics; "Pseudo-Conservatism Revisited-1965", pp. 66-92 in Ibid.; and "Goldwater and Pseudo-Conservative Politics",pp. 93-141 in Ibid.

29. "They Have Labeled Moral Majority the Extreme Right Because We Speak Out against Extreme Wrong!", advertisement, New York Times, March 23, 1981, p. B-11. I have drawn a number of statements from this "manifesto", for it represents one of the most complete self-descriptions the movement has issued for "outside" consumption. It is also consistent with a number of more fragmentary statements to be found elsewhere.

30. Ibid.

31. New York Times, "Militant Television Preachers" (January 21, 1980), p. 21.

32. New York Times, "They Have Labeled..." (March 23, 1981), p. B-11.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. Daniel Bell, "The Dispossessed", in Daniel Bell (ed.), The Radical Right. (New York: Doubleday, 1963), pp. 1-8.